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INQUIRY

Topic: MERCENARIES

Robert K. Brown, 52, is the publisher of *Soldier of Fortune* and *Combat Weapons* magazines, which have a paid circulation of 190,000. He was a captain in the U.S. Army Special Forces in Vietnam. He stayed in the Army reserves and retired in January as a lieutenant colonel. Brown was interviewed by freelance journalist **Mary-Ann Bendel.**



Robert K. Brown

In real life, 'Rambos' are both good and bad

USA TODAY: Are there a lot of mercenaries operating around the world today?

BROWN: It depends on how you want to define mercenary. A case could be made that the Cubans or Russian surrogates in Angola are mercenaries, much like the Hessians that King George III hired. The same would be true with the Pakistanis that are being employed by the Saudis. I think there are 10,000 or 20,000 Pakistani troops loaned out or rented out to the Saudis. Therefore, that might be even more of a direct parallel to the Hessian situation.

USA TODAY: Where is the best place in the world for a mercenary to sell his services right now?

BROWN: There really isn't any great opportunity.

USA TODAY: How about Central America?

BROWN: We have to take the problems in Central America on a case-by-case basis. For instance, in El Salvador, they do not, to the best of my knowledge, have mercenaries down there, for the simple reason that they have U.S. funds; therefore, they're not in a position where they feel they need to hire foreign combat troops.

USA TODAY: How about Nicaragua?

BROWN: In Nicaragua, the Americans who have been down there that I know of — who have been involved in combat and/or training missions with the Nicaragua freedom fighters — have gone down there at their own expense and have received no wages. So they would not be paid mercenaries.

USA TODAY: You just returned from South Africa. Did you see any evidence of mercenaries operating there?

BROWN: I think there are a handful of volunteers serving with the South African forces.

USA TODAY: Any from the USA?

BROWN: No. But there are some from Britain.

USA TODAY: What's your opinion of what's happening there?

BROWN: The media are treating the situation in South Africa just like they treated the situation in Rhodesia.

USA TODAY: How so?

BROWN: Oh, distortions, self-righteous, very moralistic attitude. "If we simply change things, everything will be super." If things are changed and they are not super, we ignore it.

USA TODAY: Why do many people still take the romantic view of mercenaries as soldiers of fortune instead of paid killers?

BROWN: I would suggest perhaps not immodestly that the *Soldier of Fortune* magazine has been responsible for this over the last 10 years. It's reached a stage in literature — and I use that word advisedly — where it's equal to the American public's interest in the Western genre or the private detective, the espionage agent. Portions of the public do perceive this as a very romantic type of endeavor because they envision it as, in most cases, an ideological motivation rather than just the dollar.

USA TODAY: But aren't most mercenaries just hired killers, some of them even psychotic?

BROWN: I take issue on that. You find people in this field who are psychopaths, but you find psychopaths in the U.S. Army. You find them in any organized or unorganized armed force in the world. You have essentially — and this may be an oversimplification — good guys and bad guys.

USA TODAY: Are you saying that some of these hired killers are just your normal, everyday guys?

BROWN: You're making a blanket statement that "they're all hired killers." That's really not the case. I would point to my experiences with the Americans I know who have been working with the Nicaraguan freedom fighters, or the Americans who served with the Rhodesian security forces during that war. They were over there for a multitude of interrelated reasons. One of the most significant, of course, was ideology — not money.

USA TODAY: Why is a movie like *Rambo*, about a mercenary, so popular?

BROWN: One explanation is that the whole premise of the movie reflects the attitude of the American public now about the Vietnam War, that we fought a good fight over there and we lost because of the poli-

ticians in Washington, D.C., and in Paris, and that the people are now starting to envision that situation as one in which the North Vietnamese are identified as the bad guys.

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USA TODAY: But doesn't a movie like that fuel the myth of the mercenary rather than show what the actual war was like?

BROWN: That one does. I would call it a fantasy movie, but in the same genre as Westerns or James Bond and private eye movies, where the good guy always wins. One of the big things about *Rambo* was when you stepped back and looked at it after it was all over, you said, "Aha! The guys in the white hats won one for once." This has not been something that has been too prevalent in movies about Vietnam since that conflict terminated.

USA TODAY: Are there places in the United States where people are being trained as mercenaries?

BROWN: If you want to really get accurate about it, the best mercenary schools in the world are at Fort Benning, Fort Bragg, and Camp Pendleton.

USA TODAY: But those are military bases; they're legitimate.

BROWN: That's right. But once an individual is discharged or leaves the U.S. services, then he has skills that have been honed to a far higher degree than anything any-

body is going to get in a little two-week piddling school down in Alabama, where for \$350 they get to run around, hear war stories, and carry weapons.

USA TODAY: Do you have any evidence that there are still some U.S. POWs in Vietnam?

BROWN: There are things that really have led me to believe that they're over there. One, when Eugene Tighe Jr., the former head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, retired a couple of years ago, he was convinced that there were still Americans being held against their will in Southeast Asia. Not too long after that, Bobby Garwood, a former Marine POW in Vietnam, gave a very convincing interview that he had personally seen POWs from the USA being held against their will. Tighe subsequently said that Garwood's information paralleled much of his own. Then Tighe later said he believed there are 50 to 60 Americans being held against their will over there. Then we see Garwood appearing in a closed congressional hearing on the POWs. If there are no POWs over there, why do they keep these reports classified?

USA TODAY: It sounds as if you don't think the government is doing all it can to get to the bottom of the POW-MIA issue.

BROWN: I strongly believe that there are a lot of people in the establishment, on both sides of the political fence as well as in the administration at the present time, that do not want the POWs to come back because there are going to be a lot of very embarrassed people if and when this occurs. It may well destroy political careers.

USA TODAY: *Soldier of Fortune* and your new magazine, *Combat Weapons*, have been quite successful. What is your circulation and who buys those magazines?

BROWN: Our paid circulation varies from month to month, but it averages out to about 100,000 to 190,000 copies. We have a pass-on readership of 3.7 per copy. So if you multiply that out, you're looking at, I would say conservatively, 600,000 people a month. When we did our last demographic survey, we figured about 40 percent of our readership were Vietnam veterans and about 17 percent were involved in various aspects of law enforcement. The rest run the gamut from dishwashers and taxicab drivers to lawyers and doctors.

USA TODAY: Your magazine offered a \$1 million reward for the pilot who flies an Mi-24/HIND Soviet combat helicopter out of Nicaragua. Has there been any significant response to that offer?

BROWN: Yes and no. Certainly one has not been flown out. I have talked to a source in the media who recently returned from Managua where he was told that, No. 1, everybody knows about the reward; No. 2, even those flown by Cuban pilots are not allowed out of the Managua area; No. 3, they are now teaching all new classes how to fly the Mi-24s because they don't trust the present pilots to fly them; and No. 4, they desperately want jets so they'll have something to shoot down the Mi-24s if someone tries to fly them out.

USA TODAY: You received a lot of flak for reprinting and delivering to the anti-Sandinista rebels in Nicaragua copies of the CIA's manual on guerrilla warfare. Why did you do it?

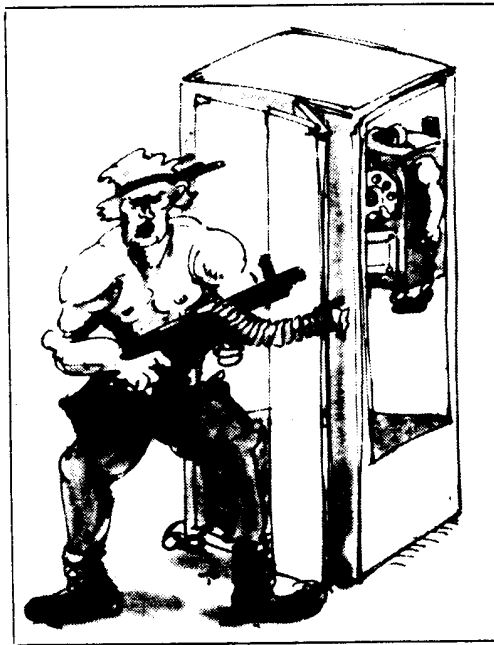
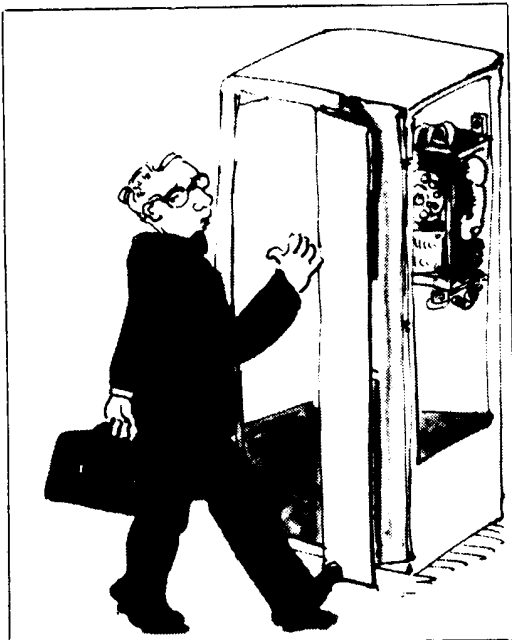
BROWN: Just because we felt it was a worthwhile publication, and we thought it was a stupid thing that this publication caused such a big furor, which I think was motivated primarily by those individuals who opposed our assisting the Nicaraguan freedom fighters. If people don't like it, if it stays within the bounds of the law, well they can go to hell.

USA TODAY: Are you funded by the CIA?

BROWN: (laughs) You're not the first to ask me that. If I was and considering our beginnings, I would say it would be one of the most effective cover operations I've ever run. But all joking aside, no, I've never gotten a nickel from them.

USA TODAY: But you do like the CIA?

BROWN: I have an ambivalent attitude. I generally agree with what they try to do. On many occasions, I take exception concerning the incompetent, inept manner with which they go about it.



By Susan Harlan, USA TODAY